

# Center for State of the Parks



## VICKSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

### SNAPSHOT

Vicksburg National Military Park in Vicksburg, Mississippi, was established in 1899 to commemorate the battle of Vicksburg and protect the ground upon which it was fought. In 1990, Congress expanded the park's interpretive mandate to include Union occupation of Vicksburg following Confederate surrender on July 4, 1863, as well as the Reconstruction period that lasted through 1877.

Today the park encompasses about 1,728 acres, including five small satellite locations: Louisiana Circle, Navy Circle, South Fort, Pemberton's Headquarters in downtown Vicksburg, and Grant's Canal, located across the Mississippi River in Louisiana. The core area of the park runs along the boundaries of the city of Vicksburg and includes the majority of the original battlefield. The park also manages Vicksburg National Cemetery, a 118-acre parcel that is the final resting place for more than 17,000 Union soldiers and sailors, as well as veterans from later wars.

Each year, about 700,000 people visit the park to learn about the site's history and to enjoy its natural features. The park offers open space, trees that provide shade, and wildlife habitat. These resources are becoming increasingly important to the area as urban development around the park



More than 125 cannons are mounted in the battlefield at Vicksburg National Military Park.

reduces available open space and natural areas.

### HISTORY

By 1862, both the Confederate and Union Armies understood that controlling the town of Vicksburg, Mississippi, was essential to winning the Civil War. By June of that year, Vicksburg was the final Confederate stronghold left along the Mississippi River.

The fighting came to the town that summer, when Union navy gunboats bombarded the Confederate bastion from mid-May to late July, to no avail. Perched high on a bluff above the river, the town of Vicksburg was well

defended against attack. Following the Union's initial failure, President Abraham Lincoln placed Major General Ulysses S. Grant in charge of the effort to capture the town.

By mid-May of 1863, Grant had surrounded Vicksburg with more than 45,000 troops. On May 19, he ordered the soldiers to attack. The battle waged on for 47 days and nights. Confederate General John Pemberton officially accepted defeat on July 4, 1863. By the end of the fighting, heavy casualties had been sustained on both sides, with almost 20,000 servicemen killed, wounded, or missing.

The victory at Vicksburg proved crucial to the Union's success in the Civil War as it secured complete control of the Mississippi River and geographically divided the Confederacy. The siege and battle of Vicksburg is widely considered one of the most important campaigns of the Civil War.

### CHALLENGES

- The park's current funding and staffing levels are insufficient to adequately care for resources. For example, despite the fact that Vicksburg National Military Park was set aside to preserve historical and cultural resources, the park has only two full-time cultural resource staff: a historian and a museum curator. The park has identified three areas in need of additional funding and staff: operation of Pemberton's Headquarters, protection of historic and cultural resources, and maintenance of the battlefield.



National Parks Conservation Association®  
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

nance of the historic battlefield. These three areas need an additional 9.4 full-time employees and about \$716,000 in funds.

- Vicksburg's interpretive staff currently consists of two interpreters, two guides, and one supervisory park ranger—not enough staff to serve the 700,000 people who visit the park each year. In addition, Congress expanded the park's interpretive mandate to include Union occupation of Vicksburg and the Reconstruction period, but the park did not receive a subsequent increase in staff or budget. Fully interpreting these additional themes will require completing research on a host of topics, including the roles of women and African Americans in Vicksburg during the campaign, Union occupation of the town following the siege, and the town during Reconstruction.
- The cultural landscape at Vicksburg National Military park has changed significantly over the past 145 years. Trees occupy the once cleared battlefield, the result of both natural forest succession and efforts to control erosion during the 1930s. They obscure important lines of sight that were present during the battle. The park has removed some trees, and plans have been proposed to remove additional trees in an effort to rehabilitate parts of the battlefield to its appearance during the war. But this cultural landscape rehabilitation is costly, and some bird-watchers and Vicksburg residents oppose tree removal. If parts of the battlefield are rehabilitated, additional funds will be needed to manage and maintain the rehabilitated landscape, and a landscape specialist will be needed to oversee and continue the work. Recent rehabilitation work within the park at the Railroad Redoubt area cost nearly \$10,000 per acre. While this figure cannot be applied directly

to the larger-scale battlefield rehabilitation project, it gives park managers a rough sense of what full battlefield rehabilitation would cost.

#### WHAT'S BEING DONE

- The park recently rehabilitated part of the landscape at the Railroad Redoubt, an earthwork built by Confederate soldiers to prevent access to the city via the railroad right-of-way. Because of these efforts, visitors are able to better understand the action that took place there, as troops from Texas defended the redoubt in hand-to-hand combat with Union soldiers. This rehabilitation also incorporated protection of the area's natural resources by allowing low brush to grow and form a riparian buffer strip on either side of Two-Mile Creek, which runs below the redoubt. This brush will provide nesting areas for birds and will reduce runoff and erosion.
- Restoration of some of the park's larger state monuments, such as the Mississippi and Louisiana State Memorials, would not have been possible without public and private support. For example, schoolchildren from Madison, Mississippi, collected aluminum cans to raise money and wrote to their state legislators urging further support for the park. As a result, the park received \$250,000 for monument restoration.
- The park controls non-native plants using various methods and has achieved noticeable improvements in treated areas.
- Vicksburg National Military Park staff are currently planning for the centennial celebration of the National Park Service (2016), as well as the 150th anniversary of the Civil War (2011-2015). One of the primary goals for the park is to establish the Vicksburg Campaign Trail, which is intended to interpret and protect

sites associated with the siege and battle at Vicksburg, and will entail establishing partnerships with different federal, state, and local agencies.

#### ABOUT NPCA AND THE CENTER FOR STATE OF THE PARKS

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

NPCA initiated the State of the Parks program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks. The goal is to provide information that will help policymakers, the public, and the National Park Service improve resource conditions in national parks, celebrate successes as models for other parks, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

#### CONTACT US

For a copy of NPCA's full report on Vicksburg National Military Park, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about the Center for State of the Parks, visit [www.npca.org/stateoftheparks](http://www.npca.org/stateoftheparks) or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president for the Center for State of the Parks, at [jnations@npca.org](mailto:jnations@npca.org).

For more information on Vicksburg National Military Park, contact NPCA's Southeast Regional Office at 865.329.2424 or [southeast@npca.org](mailto:southeast@npca.org), or visit the park online at [www.nps.gov/vick](http://www.nps.gov/vick). For media inquiries, please contact Perry Wheeler, NPCA media relations coordinator, at 202.419.3712 or [pwheeler@npca.org](mailto:pwheeler@npca.org). To learn more about what the public and our elected officials can do to help improve the health of this park, visit [www.npca.org/take\\_action](http://www.npca.org/take_action).